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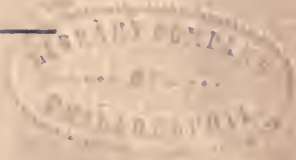
IRVINE

LEON PONTIFEXX

BY

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AUTHOR OF "CAPE COD FOLKS," "LASTCHANCE JUNCTION," "SOME
OTHER FOLKS," "TOWHEAD," ETC.



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LEON PONTIFEX.

CHAPTER I.

BEULAH SINGS "BEULAH LAND."

"YE can't git a ten-thousand-dollar man in a five-hunderd-dollar pulpit. No, sir; ye can't do it. Now, preachin' ain't what it was in them days when He, the Lord Jesus Christ, went around not chargin' anythin', and eatin' field-corn, and ketchin' His own fish, and preachin' to all kinds o' folks, anywheres as the sky'd cover Him. No, sir; good preachin' nowadays is jest like other truck, it's wuth what it'll fetch. And I tell ye, ye can't expect to git no ten-thousand-dollar man down here into this little five-hunderd-dollar parish."

"Wal', yes; I know, I know, Deacon Sextile; but, after 'all, it don't seem as though we'd ought to take up with anybody too — 'tarnal ridick'lous, now doos it?"

“Wal’, I don’ know; we’re commanded by St. Paul not to look on a man’s outside figger. He’s a singerlar-lookin’ creetur’, I ’low — but similarly, ye see, he’ll come dirt cheap. He ’lows he’ll include the whole parish business, fancy and reg’lar, for four hunderd and fifty dollars a year. No harm in lettin’ the poor ornery creetur’ preach once, and jedgin’ what ye think of him, anyway, I told ’em.”

The Rev. Leon Pontifex was seen approaching. He was tall, with powerful broad shoulders slightly bowed; with a profusion of dull yellow hair, negroish in form and quality; with pale and heavy features, and eyes that appeared as if they might be blind, they were so dim, sodden, and habitually downcast.

The young maidens, also gathered on the church porch to witness the approach of the new minister, retired on beholding him into the cloak-room, and giggled hysterically. Formidable gold-rimmed spectacles glared at his unique and unprepossessing person with piously restrained disfavor. But the poor object of this unflattering attention seemed neither to see nor hear.

The fact, patent to its inhabitants, that this

forlorn little village of Edmond was imminently an important railway centre; that the new pulpit cover donated by the "Ladies' Society" was of silk plush and a careful work of art; that the bonnet worn by the leading deacon's lady was an actual import from her sister in New York: all seemed to make no more impression upon the mind of the Rev. Leon Pontifex than upon some sad old leafless branch that the wind has blown down.

He was not old, and yet he seemed indefinitely old. As he rose in the pulpit, some gasping children gave up at last the unequal struggle with their emotions and burst into a paroxysm of audible merriment. The minister's sad, dim countenance did not change. He went through the preliminary acts of the service in a voice that filled his audience with wonder, that grew more and more into a listening awe and silence; such a great, deep-rolling voice, full of expression, tender or awful, and vast, as though strangely confined in the little painted chapel of Edmond, and capable, should it get out rampant, of filling the whole hamlet of Edmond and important wild stretches beyond!